

*Middletown, NY* -- In an effort to help safeguard Orange County residents from fraud and scams, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today sponsored a free public forum at the Mulberry House Senior Center in Middletown. The event, which was also sponsored by Orange County Executive Edward A. Diana, the Orange County Office of the Aging, the Orange County Department of Consumer Affairs and the Community Foundation of Orange and Sullivan County, provided seniors and other area residents a chance to learn how they can protect themselves from a wide array of mail, phone, and online scams as well as identity theft. Hinchey brought together federal and local anti-fraud experts to speak to all interested residents at the forum entitled, "Being Scam Smart: Protecting Your Money and Identity from Fraud."

"Unfortunately, we continue to see a rising number and increasing sophistication of financial and identity theft scams targeted at seniors as well as many other demographic groups who may be vulnerable," Hinchey said. "While law enforcement continues to crack down on scam artists, the best way to prevent scams from being carried out is for the public to learn ways to spot fraudulent offers and avoid falling into a trap that will be costly in terms of both money and time. That's why I organized this forum - because everyone needs to know how avoid becoming a victim of a scam."

County Executive Edward Diana, who spoke at the event and cosponsored the event with Hinchey, said, "Orange County government is pleased to collaborate with the federal government in educating the citizens – most notably the seniors- in Orange County. This program is a perfect complement to our Consumer Affairs office which deals with these issues each and every day. It's critical that residents be aware and informed in order to protect themselves and their finances in this fragile economic climate. I hope people will take advantage of this important opportunity. An educated resident is a protected resident."

Among the topics discussed at the forum were ways for Orange County residents to protect themselves from: identity theft and telemarketing scams; fake medical discount plans; charities and fundraising fraud; false credit and loan offers; fraudulent sweepstakes and lotteries; phony club memberships; and travel schemes.

After welcoming remarks from Congressman Hinchey's office, County Executive Diana, and the Community Foundation of Orange and Sullivan, three presentations were given. Len Gordon, Director of the Northeast Region of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and Charles F. Mitchell, Commissioner of the Orange County Department of Consumer Affairs both made presentations, and a US Postal Service public service video entitled "Delivering Justice: Identity

Crisis" was screened. Attendees participated in a Q&A session following the presentations.